

Opinion

Soledad Bee

Mural inspires inmates to discover their skills

The huge mural created by inmates is titled "Essence," a name drawn from the earth and wildlife which provided the inspiration for the work.

For some of the estimated 20 Correctional Training Facility inmates who have worked on the piece since November 1986, however, inspiration was returned by the work itself.

"It's given me a lot of appreciation for art, being involved in this mural. It's inspired me a lot," said inmate Carlos Sagastame. "It was like something you always had inside — and you developed it."

Like some of the other four inmates putting the finishing touches on the mural — which will brighten up the bare walls of the new North Facility visiting room when finished — Sagastame would now like to be an artist when he's released from prison as a result of what he's discovered about himself from the project.

The mural, which is six feet high by 44 feet long, will be dedicated March 4 at 2 p.m. with the expected help of dignitaries such as Sen. Henry Mello.

The project originated when Yermo Aranda was hired as a teacher at the CTF's arts program in September, 1985. One of Aranda's specialties as an artist has been murals — an interest which stretches back to 1969.

"My role was to bring them together and teach them about the mural concept," said Aranda of his student-inmates. "Everybody came up with an idea, whether it was a scene of a bird or a mountain. We did several large studies before we put them together."

Part of the funding for the project came from the California Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts.



Opening the walls

When choosing subject material for the mural, the inmates decided to shy away from depicting people for fear of offending one group or another in the ethnically conscious institution. Hence, the decision to focus on nature.

A HANDFUL of Correctional Training Facility inmates, including Carlos Sagastame (T-shirt) and Art Garcia, are applying the finishing touches to a giant mural which will hang in the North Facility visiting room.

Aranda said the idea of the project and the decision to find a home for the work on the rather barren walls of the new North Facility room grew up together. The title, "Essence," sprang up during a conversation.

"Being it dealt so much with the

earth and wildlife, which they (inmates) saw as very positive, that's basically where the name came from" Aranda said. "I think what we originally wanted to do is open up the walls (of the prison) visually."

The 20 inmates who have worked on

"It's good-quality work. We have a lot of talented artists here."

— Art Garcia

the project at various times, after learning the basics of watercolor, have now been boiled down to four artists. The four men are the ones who are fine-tuning the pastoral scenes, animals and cloud formations, which also swirl into the shape of various wildlife, with dabs of paint.

"The top of the class," said Aranda. "I would say they have the skills it takes for the fine details."

The inmates say they are proud of the fruits of their labor.

"It's good-quality work. We have a lot of talented artists here," said inmate Art Garcia. "You can see everybody's personality in the work they're doing — the eagles, buffalos and bears."

As a result of having discovered a dormant talent through work on the mural, the inmates now also labor over paintings back in their cells. They would like to be artists when returning to society, with Sagastame, for example, saying he's interested in pursuing portraits.

If a recent California Department of Corrections (CDC) study is accurate, his chances of making good on the outside — or at least not ending

up back behind bars — are increased as a result of his time spent taking "arts-in-corrections" classes.

The study said 69 percent of inmates enrolled in CDC art classes for at least six months were able to successfully abide by the terms of their parole two years after being released. Only 42 percent of all CDC inmates succeeded.

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